

# SB 769

## The Background:

The passage of Measure 18 in 1994 removed the ability for Oregon's hunters to use hounds while pursuing cougars (*Puma concolor*) and as a result, removed a wildlife management tool for those charged with managing Oregon's wildlife.

The statewide ban on cougar hunting with hounds resulted in a steady increase in cougar populations. **The current cougar population estimate is 7,040** ([ODFW presentation, September 2024](#)); the minimum population threshold identified in the 2017 ODFW Cougar Management Plan is 3,000 cougars.

## The Impacts on Ungulate Species:

Cougar populations in Oregon are currently operating at or very close to their carrying capacity which is the maximum number of individual cougars that the landscape can support. Concurrently, their **prey species (e.g., deer, elk, bighorn sheep) are experiencing significant population declines in certain areas of Oregon.**

Per [Clark et al. \(2014\)](#) ungulate species made up over 95% of cougar kills, equating to 1.03 ungulates killed per week. The diet of male cougars is roughly equal between elk and deer while female cougars predate mainly on deer at 74.6%.

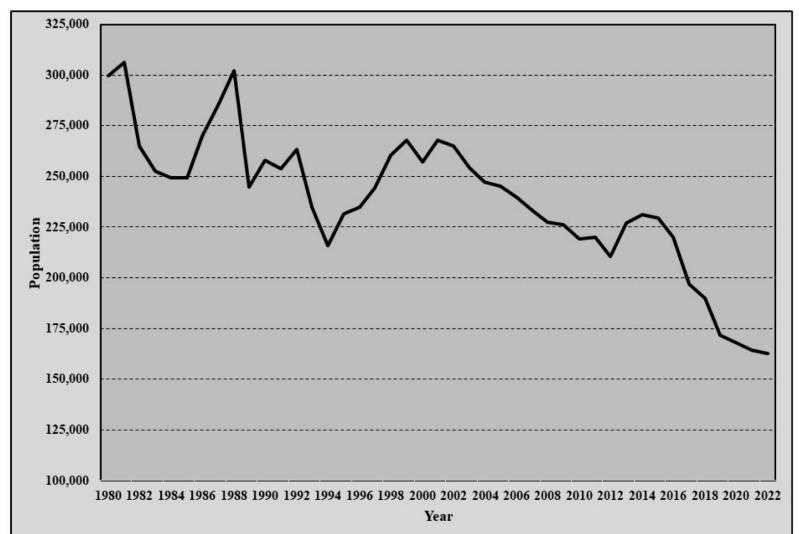
[Clark et al. \(2014\)](#) found strong evidence that **cougars select for juvenile elk and deer** and asserts that wildlife managers should consider the potential negative effects of cougars on ungulate populations in areas where juvenile recruitment has been chronically low.

Landscape conditions (i.e., forage quality and quantity) substantially influence population dynamics of ungulate species, however additive effects of predation should not be ignored. Per [Clark \(2014\)](#), **cougars can be a strong limiting factor for elk populations.** Wildlife managers should consider the potential top-down effects of cougars and other predators as a limiting factor of elk populations.

## The Impacts on Public Safety:

As the human footprint grows in conjunction with an increasing cougar population, the prevalence of human-wildlife conflicts and human safety concerns grow:

- Gold Beach, May 2024: [https://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2024/05\\_May/052024.asp](https://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2024/05_May/052024.asp)
- Hillsboro, July 2024: <https://hillsboroherald.com/massive-cougar-spotted-in-se-hillsboro-on-ring-camera/>
- Newport docks, October 2024: [https://www.newportnewstimes.com/news/cougar-spotted-on-newport-docks/article\\_1757a09a-90b6-11ef-8006-6f452f4b3bee.html](https://www.newportnewstimes.com/news/cougar-spotted-on-newport-docks/article_1757a09a-90b6-11ef-8006-6f452f4b3bee.html)
- Minto Brown Park, Salem, December 2024: <https://www.koin.com/news/oregon/salem-officials-warn-residents-after-confirmed-cougar-sighting-at-minto-brown-island-park/>



Mule deer population numbers have declined due to habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, predation, and other limiting factors.

- Tillamook, January 2025: <https://www.koin.com/local/oregon-coast/police-address-unconfirmed-cougar-sightings-in-tillamook/>

[Parsons et al. \(2024\)](#) found that hunting and/or pursuing cougars with hounds can **increase cougar sensitivity to humans and therefore should reduce human-wildlife conflicts** particularly in the wildland-urban interface.

### The Solution:

Responsible management of wildlife means **managing both prey and predator species.**

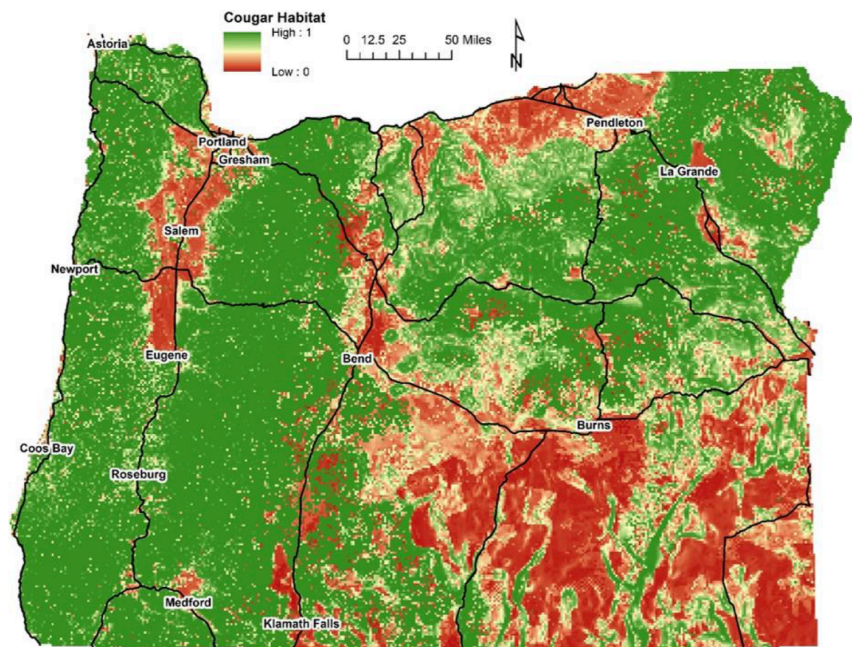
To effectively manage cougars, **hunting with hounds is the most effective means to harvest an animal.**

Despite several steps made to increase cougar harvest in Oregon to benefit prey species (e.g., reduction in tag price, addition of second tag, year-round season), **efforts to increase cougar harvest have failed because it is extremely difficult to harvest cougars without use of hounds.**

The number of cougar tags issued in 2023 was 70,908 while the number of cougars harvested was 262 or a **success rate of 0.0037%.**

Use of hounds for hunting is a tool that wildlife managers can use to reduce cougar predation on ungulate populations at important times of year for prey species. Recall that it is the **Mission of ODFW to protect and improve Oregon's fish, wildlife, and their habitats for current and future generations, which obviously includes prey species like deer and elk.**

Currently, ODFW has used agents to address cougar predation at modest scales. Benefits of these predator control efforts are often short-lived and marginal. However, it is reasonable to assume, **with a methodical and scientific approach to season location, length and timing, hound hunting for cougars by willing hunters would likely improve long term vital rates of mule deer, elk and other prey species.**



Habitat use of cougars (ODFW 2017 Cougar Management Plan)

### Regional Flexibility is the Key:

**Cougar populations, ungulate and other prey species performance, and social acceptance of cougars related to the impacts to wildlife, livestock, and pets vary by region.** Therefore, the regional solution in SB 769 is not only warranted but required to address these issues. Oregon is a myriad of landscapes and habitats that each present unique challenges. **Sustainable wildlife management must be adaptive to address challenges.**